

**MOTHER
CHRISTMAS
AND OTHER STORIES**

**A BOOK OF
CHRISTMAS STORIES**





This Book belongs to -
Genevieve Flynn.

4426. Ord st. N.C.



All heaven is stirred!
All earth is glad!
For down the shining way,
The Lord who came to Bethlehem,
Comes yet, on Christmas Day.

The University of
North Carolina
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The Night Before Christmas

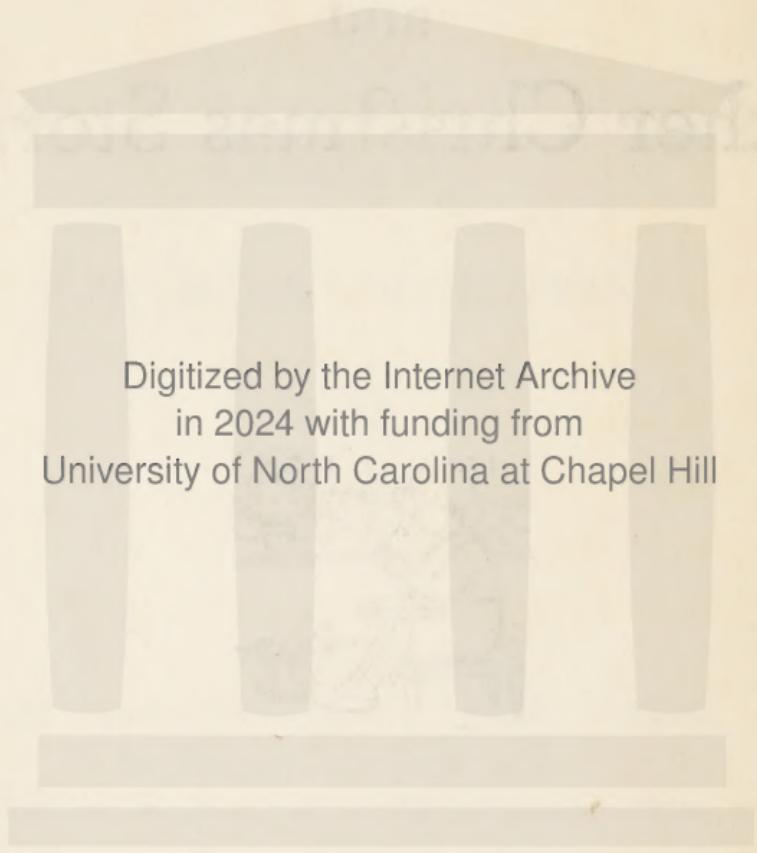
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Other Christmas Stories



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The Stories In This Book

The Night Before Christmas

The Noel Candle

The Little Gray Lamb

The Legend of the Christmas Tree

The Christmas Goblins

The Christmas Princess

The Wooden Shoe

Mother Hubbard's House Party

the choice of the

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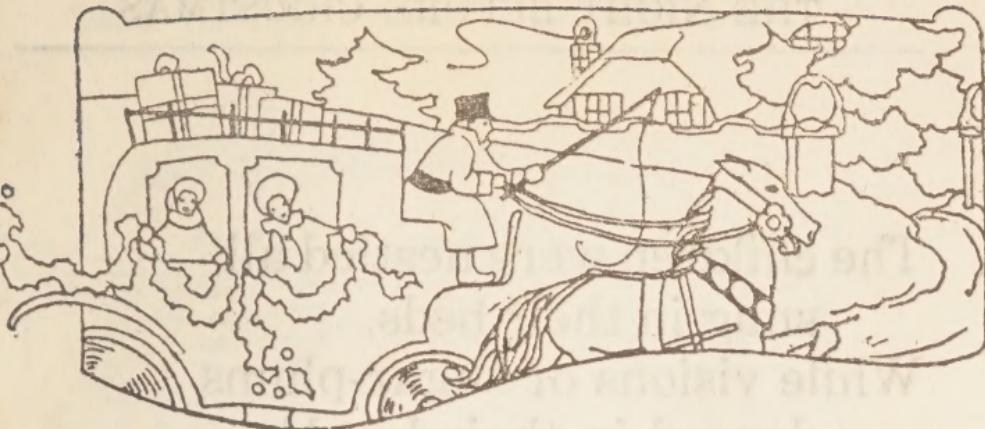
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The Night Before Christmas

'Twas the night before Christmas
 when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring,
 not even a mouse.

The stockings were hung by the
 chimney with care,
In hopes that Saint Nicholas
 soon would be there.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

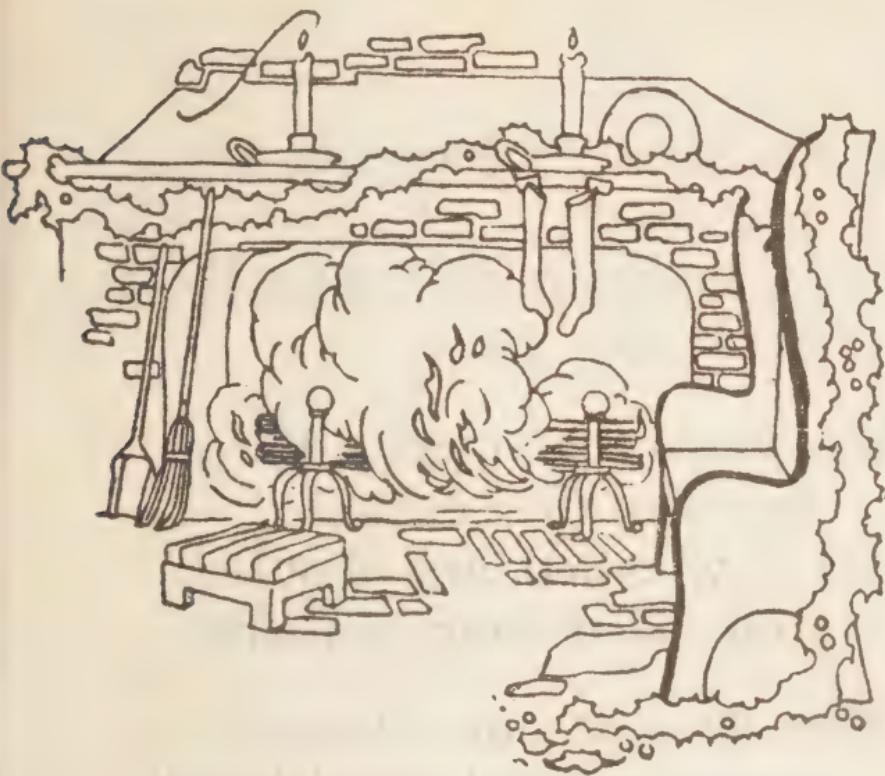
The children were nestled all
snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums
danced in their heads.

And Mamma in her 'kerchief and
I in my cap,
Had just settled down for a
long winter's nap

When out on the lawn
there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed
to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a
flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw
up the sash.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS



The moon on the breast of the
new fallen snow,
Gave a lustre of mid-day to
objects below,

When, what to my wondering
eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and
eight tiny reindeer;

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

With a little old driver, so lively
and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be
St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles his
coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted,
and called them by name:

“Now, Dasher! now, Dancer!
now, Prancer! and Vixen!
On! Comet, on Cupid, on!
Donder and Blitzen.

To the top of the porch, to the
top of the wall!
Now, dash away, dash away,
dash away all!”



As dry leaves that before the wild
 hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle,
 mount to the sky.

So up to the house-top
 the coursers they flew
With the sleigh full of Toys,
 and St. Nicholas too.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

And then in a twinkle, I
 heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of
 each little hoof.

As I drew in my head, and
 was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas
 came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from
 his head to his foot.
And his clothes were all tar-
 nished with ashes and soot;

A bundle of Toys he had flung
 on his back,
And he looked like a peddler
 just opening his pack.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

His eyes, how they twinkled! his
dimples, how merry!

His cheeks were like roses, his
nose like a cherry!

His droll little mouth was drawn
up like a bow,

And the Beard of his chin was
as white as the snow.

The stump of a pipe he held
tight in his teeth,

And the smoke, it encircled
his head like a wreath.

He had a broad face and a little
round belly

That shook, when he laughed,
like a bowl full of jelly.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

He was chubby and plump, a
right jolly old elf,
And I laughed, when I saw him,
in spite of myself.

A wink of his eye, and a twist
of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had
nothing to dread;

He spoke not a word, but went
straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings, then
turned with a jerk.

And laying his finger aside of
his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chim-
ney he rose;

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

He sprang to his sleigh, to his
team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down
on a thistle.

But I heard him exclaim ere
he drove out of sight,
“Happy Christmas to all and to
all A Good Night.”





The Noel Candle

IT WAS Christmas eve in Rheims, nearly five hundred years ago. The great cathedral towered high above the city, its spires seemed to reach to the very skies, and the square in front of the church was thronged with people, celebrating the joyous Noel, the Christmas time. Children darted here and there through the crowd, shrieking with laughter. On one corner a group of well dressed youths and maidens were dancing to the music of a lute and tambourine; on another a number of boys sang old carols. Others strolled about in groups of two and three, chatting and laughing, while the older and more serious went their way, candle in hand, toward the cathedral, where masses were being chanted in Latin.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Though these church-goers were more quiet, it was evident that they were happy, for their faces shone with contentment. It did not seem that there could be, in all the city of Rheims, one sad or lonely heart.

Yet there were four. Three of them dwelt in a squalid hovel by the riverside, a tiny shed or lean-to which stood beside a stable. Though its outward appearance was so dismal, once within the door, one might have been surprised to see how neat and trim it was kept. There was but one room which served at once as living-room, dining-room, bed-room and kitchen for three people. The rough stone floor was carefully swept and polished. In one corner lay a straw-filled mattress, but the covers drawn over it, though patched and darned in a dozen places, were spotlessly clean. A rude table, a broken



THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

chair, a stool and a clumsy bench completed the furniture of the room. In a far corner stood a small charcoal brazier, whose feeble fire served not only to cook the meals, but to warm the dwellers in the hut. Some cracked earthen kettles hung beside it.

The one touch of brightness and beauty in the little room was supplied by a tiny shrine, built on a shelf at the rear wall. A few field flowers in a bowl stood before it, and from the edge of the shelf hung a silken sash which once had held a knight's shield. It was of scarlet, heavily embroidered in gold, and bore a devise of a lion, surmounted by the lily of France.

Three people were in the room. A young woman was bending over a small spinning wheel, a boy of seven was setting the table with their few

THE NOEL CANDLE

cracked dishes, and a girl a year or so older was leaning over a kettle on the brazier, stirring its contents from time to time. The lady, whose beauty seemed to shine in the poor room, despite her shabby clothing, was Madame la Comtesse Marie de Malin-court, and the boy and girl, her son and daughter, Louis and Jeanne.

As she worked the lady was thinking sadly of that Christmas eve only a year before, when all had been so different. Then she had lived in a great castle, and on the eve of Noel, as she had done for a half dozen years before, she and her husband and the children had gone down to the castle gate to greet the crowd that had assembled. The old, the ailing, and the poor had gathered there, and that meant nearly all the village. Out among the crowd they had gone, followed by a dozen serv-

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

ants, laden down like beasts of burden and to each villager the lady had made gifts of warm clothing, of healing herbs, and of wholesome food. Even Louis and Jeanne, young as they were, had given from their store of toys and baubles to the children of the village.

Then the tide of war had swept over their happy valley; the castle had been attacked, defended, and lost, then sacked and pillaged by the victors. Lady Marie had even seen them lead her husband away a prisoner. She had fled with her children, down a secret passage out into the night and away to the village. She found it deserted, the villagers driven out before the sword.

During the months that had ensued the three had been wanderers along the highway. Bit by bit Lady Marie had given her jewels and trin-



THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

kets, then those of the children, in exchange for food and lodging. Even her velvet robe, with its soft fur mantle, had gone to the wife of a rich burgher, and the pretty clothing of Louis and Jeanne had long since been replaced with coarse peasant garb. One thing alone remained of all their riches—the cover of her husband's shield, which little Louis had brought from the castle that dreadful night. "Father gave it to me to keep until he came back," he said, and through all the terrors of flight he had clung to it. It was very dear to them all. It seemed a bit of their old life, and a constant reminder of the dear lost father.

"Mother," said Jeanne suddenly, interrupting the current of her mother's sad thoughts, "it is Noel tonight."

"Yes, my child," Lady Marie an-

THE NOEL CANDLE

swered with a sigh, "but there will be no toys, or sweets, or pretty things for thee or little Louis this Noel."

"We want them not," the children answered, almost in unison. "We have thee, dear mother, and we can keep the Noel in our hearts," added Jeanne.

Her mother looked up from the wheel and smiled at her. "Yes, though life is hard," she said, "still, we have each other, and though we are sad, perhaps there are other hearts in Rheims that grieve tonight. I wish I might give, as once I did, to the poor, but I have nothing to give. We have ourselves become the poor." She resumed her work, but there was silence in the room save for the whir of the wheel.

"Mother," Jeanne spoke again excitedly, "I know something we can give." As she talked she caught up

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

the small tallow dip candle from the table and hurried with it to the one window of the hut.

“See,” she went on, “I will put it here—on the sill—so—and perhaps someone who passes, someone like ourselves lonely and forlorn, will be the happier for my little gift of light. There—see how it shines out on the snow,” and she stood back to survey her work.

“You are a good child, Jeanne,” said Lady Marie, then, sighing, she resumed her work, her silence, her sad thoughts.

Down in the great square, among all the lights and gayety, was another sad heart. It beat in the breast of a little lad of nine, a boy whose clothes were shabby and ragged, whose bare feet were thrust into clumsy wooden sabots, and with no covering on his head but his own fair

THE NOEL CANDLE

hair. He was utterly alone, without money, without friends, cold, hungry, miserable. When it seemed he could bear this burden alone no longer; he tried to tell his story to some of the smiling people he saw about him. Surely among so many he would find friends. But no one took any interest in him, other than to frown at him, or elbow him roughly out of the way, and one man shook him by the shoulder, and called him a beggar.

He left the square at last in utter discouragement, and began to tramp the streets, stopping now and then at splendid dwellings through whose windows streamed bright lights like a welcoming smile. But there was no welcome for the lonely child. Fat, well-dressed servants turned him away with angry words, and threatened him with their dogs.

It was dark in the streets of

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Rheims now, and the air was growing colder, but the child tramped on, trying desperately to find shelter before the night closed in. At last, far off down by the river, he saw a tiny gleam of light appear suddenly at a window and he hurried toward it. As he neared it, the boy saw that it was only a small tallow dip at the window of a hovel, the poorest and meanest hut in all Rheims, but the steady light of the tiny flame brought a sudden glow to his heart and he ran forward and knocked at the door.

It was opened in an instant by a little girl, and at once the other two in the room had risen to greet him. In another moment he found himself seated on a stool beside the charcoal brazier. The little girl was rubbing one of his cold hands in her two warm palms, while her brother was

THE NOEL CANDLE

holding the other, and a beautiful woman, kneeling at his feet, drew off the wooden shoes, and chafed his icy feet. When he was thoroughly warmed, the little girl dished up into three bowls and a cracked cup the stew which had been simmering on the fire. There was only a little of it, a scant meal for themselves, but she passed the fullest bowl to the stranger and made room for him beside her on the bench.

After a word of blessing, they ate their stew, and never had the thin soup tasted so rich or so satisfying to the countess and her children. As they finished, a sudden glowing light filled the room, greater than the brightness of a thousand candles. There was a sound of angel voices, and the stranger child had grown so radiant that they could scarcely bear to look at him.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

"Thou, with thy little candle, hast lighted the Christ-child on his way to Heaven," said their unknown guest, his hand on the door latch. "This night shall thy dearest wish be granted thee," and in another instant he was gone.

The countess and her children fell on their knees and prayed, and there they still were, almost a quarter of an hour later, when a knight in armor gently pushed open the door and entered the hut.

"Marie! Jeanne! Louis!" he cried in a voice of love and longing. "Do ye not know me after all these weary months of prison and battle, and then of search for thee?"

Immediately his family where clustered about him, and their kisses and embraces were his answer.

"But, father, how did you find us here," cried little Louis at last, when

THE NOEL CANDLE

the first raptures of welcome were over.

"A ragged lad I met on the highway told me ye dwelt here," answered the knight.

"The Christ-child," said Lady Marie reverently, and told him the story.

And so, forever after, they and all their descendants, have burned a candle in the window on the eve of Noel, to light the lonely Christ-child on his way.



The Little Gray Lamb

ONCE upon a time, long, long ago, folded safely away in the hills around Bethlehem, a little group of shepherds tended their flocks. By day one could see, dotted about over the rooling hillsides, hundreds of snowy sheep and tiny lambs, and moving here and there amongst them, were the shepherds and their dogs.

All day the flocks grazed on the slopes, up to the fringe of cypress trees that crowned the hilltop. Toward sunset the shepherds, aided by the dogs, began to gather the sheep together, and to drive them toward a little hollow in the hills, where they would be comparatively safe from the wolves and jackals that roamed about at night.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Then the men would build a bonfire and all but two of them would lie down beside it and sleep. These two, crooks in hand, and with trusty dogs nearby, would keep guard over the flocks.

The tired sheep, glad to lie down after roaming about and grazing all day, huddled closely together like friendly puppies. The wee lambs, funny wabbly-legged little creatures, would cuddle up very close to their mothers, and fall asleep, perhaps to dream happy dreams of new grazing grounds.

But there was one little lamb who was not dreaming, and whose eyes were wide open, staring up into the sky. He lay out at the edge of the flock, a little apart from the others, and away from his own mother. His fleece was a dull and homely gray. Poor little lamb, his mother was

THE LITTLE GRAY LAMB

ashamed of his appearance, and felt it hard to bear that she, whose fleece was the finest and whitest of the flock, should have a son so ugly to look upon.

All the other sheep, and even the lambs of his own age, turned up their wrinkly noses at the little gray one, and kept away from him, except now and then when he had selected a particularly nice spot for grazing. Then very often, it happened that one of the older ones would come up very close, and, shouldering him roughly aside, would take his place.

The little gray lamb never protested. He knew he was ugly and gray, and what could such a lamb expect of the world? His fleece was no good to sell—doubtless when he got older the shepherds themselves would kill him and roast him over their fire for supper. Or perhaps a

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

wolf would steal out from among the cypress trees, and, seeing him lying alone, apart from the flock, would carry him off into the dark forest and devour him.

If he were only white! He used to lift his tired little face to the stars and give a faint weary bleat that seemed to mean, "Oh, give me a white fleece." But though he wished for it day after day, and night after night, with all his little heart, his wool remained as dark and grimy looking as ever. The wee lamb grew more hopeless with each day that passed.

One night as he lay at the edge of the flock as usual, looking up at the sky and the dark clouds that went scudding across it, there suddenly appeared through a rift in the clouds, a star larger and more brilliant than any he had ever seen before. It grew

THE LITTLE GRAY LAMB

brighter and brighter as the little lamb watched it, and presently began to drop lower in the sky until it seemed to hang directly over the roofs of Bethlehem.

Then the dogs began to notice the strange light, which was making the fields as bright as day, and they ran about excitedly, whimpering and barking. The shepherds on guard roused their sleeping companions, and all watched the strange new star, not knowing whether it boded good or evil.

Suddenly on the still night air came a chorus of angel voices, and at that sound, the watching group fell on their knees in awe. "Peace on earth," the angels sang, "good will to men." Then the voices told the joyful tidings of the birth of a King, a Savior and Redeemer long awaited by the people. He had been

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

born in Bethlehem, and would be found wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Almost before the last notes of the heavenly song had died away, the shepherds were on their way toward the town of Bethlehem. Catching up their crooks, and flinging thier mantles hastily about them, they rushed away, climbing over rocks and dodging about among the cypress trees, following the guiding light of the star.

The patient sheep, trained to follow wherever their protectors led, arose and hurried after, like dim ghosts in the starlight. At the very end of the flock trailed the ugly gray lamb, afraid to be left behind, yet almost ashamed to go with them. "In the throne-room of a King, where would there be room for a miserable gray lamb?" he asked himself.



THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

A sharp stone caught in one hoof. He bleated piteously, but the shepherds were too far ahead now to hear his feeble voice or to notice his plight. For a few steps he ran along on three legs, then he stopped and pawed the ground until he loosened the stone and it fell out. But the tender little foot had been cut, and it hurt him sorely, so that he limped now, and gradually he fell behind the others. Still he plodded on, lonely — frightened — utterly miserable.

After what seemed miles to the little gray lamb—so weak and wabbly on his slim little legs—the fields were left behind, and the streets of the town were reached. Far behind in the distance he could see the shepherds and their flocks were entering the courtyard of an inn, and passing on toward the stables. Wearily he

THE LITTLE GRAY LAMB

followed, almost too tired now to see that the big bright star hung directly overhead.

He reached the door at last. All the others had passed in, and as he paused on the threshold, he could see the sheep all lying down quietly among the stalls in the big stable. The dogs were at rest too, their heads between their outstretched paws. The shepherds knelt on the rough stone floor just ahead of their flocks.

The little gray lamb tottered forward a step or two on his shaky legs. Now he could see the backs of three men kneeling near the edge of the manger, plainly dressed—a tradesman of some sort, a potter perhaps, or a carpenter, kneeling by a manger—three men who wore crowns, and whose long flowing robes were stiff with threads of gold and silver.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

They were holding their hands, filled with rare offerings, chains of gems, vases of incense and ornaments of carved ivory.

In the manger, sat a young woman, holding a child in her arms. He was a very young Baby, with fair clustering curls that seemed to shine so that they made a soft glow of light in the dark stable. Suddenly the Child caught sight of the little gray lamb, standing quite alone, not far away, swaying a little on his tired lame feet. With a little gurgle of pleasure, He held out His baby arms.

The little gray lamb forgot then, for the first time in all his life, that he WAS gray. With a faint bleat he ran toward the manger, and lay down, close beside it, and the Baby buried His chubby hands in the soft gray fleece.

THE LITTLE GRAY LAMB

At that gentle touch the little gray lamb felt suddenly happy—his lame foot no longer hurt — he was not tired—why—it did not even seem to matter now that he was not white like the rest of the flock.

There was a subdued hum of voices around him, murmurs of amazement. He could hear the voices of the men in the glittering robes—the voice of the man who knelt beside the manger—the mother's voice, soft and sweet—and then the more familiar voices of his own shepherds. Presently the little gray lamb heard them say:

“It turned white.”

“Oh—did you see—”

“Just when He touched it—”

Then the little gray lamb felt other hands than the Child's upon him, all touching him gently and reverently. He turned and looked over his

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

shoulder. A smooth hand, covered with rings, lay on his back—no—it could not be on him—for the fleece was white—while his was—he looked down at his breast. It was now pure white. He stared at his legs. They, too, were covered with fleece as white and soft as the snow itself.

Then the little gray lamb bowed his head low before the Holy Child, in token of gratitude for the great blessing that had come to him and made him whiter than all the rest.

The Legend of the Christmas Tree

MOST children have seen a Christmas tree, and many know that the pretty and pleasant custom of hanging gifts on its boughs comes from Germany; but perhaps few have heard or read the story that is told to little German children, respecting the origin of this custom. The story is called "The Little Stranger," and runs thus:

In a small cottage on the borders of a forest lived a poor laborer, who gained a scanty living by cutting wood. He had a wife and two children who helped him in his work. The boy's name was Valentine, and the girl was called Mary. They were obedient, good children, and a great comfort to their parents. One winter evening, this happy little family

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

were sitting quietly round the hearth, the snow and the wind raging outside, while they ate their supper of dry bread, when a gentle tap was heard on the window, and a childish voice cried from without: "Oh, let me in, pray! I am a poor child, with nothing to eat, and no home to go to, and I shall die of cold and hunger unless you let me in."

Valentine and Mary jumped up from the table and ran to open the door, saying: "Come in, poor little child! We have not much to give you, but whatever we have we will share with you."

The stranger-child came in and warmed his frozen hands and feet at the fire, and the children gave him the best they had to eat, saying: "You must be tired, too, poor child! Lie down on our bed; we can sleep on the bench for one night."

CHRISTMAS TREE LEGEND

Then said the little stranger-child: "Thank God for all your kindness to me!"

So they took their little guest into their sleeping-room, laid him on the bed, covered him over, and said to each other: "How thankful we ought to be! We have warm rooms and a cozy bed, while this poor child has only heaven for his roof and the cold earth for his sleeping-place."

When their father and mother went to bed, Mary and Valentine lay quite contentedly on the bench near the fire, saying, before they fell asleep: "The stranger-child will be so happy to-night in his warm bed!"

These kind children had not slept many hours before Mary awoke, and softly whispered to her brother: "Valentine, dear, wake, and listen to the sweet music under the window."

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Then Valentine rubbed his eyes and listened. It was sweet music indeed, and sounded like beautiful voices singing to the tones of a harp:

“Oh holy Child, we greet thee!
bringing

Sweet strains of harp to aid our
singing.

“Thou, holy Child, in peace art
sleeping,

While we our watch without are
keeping.

“Blest be the house wherein thou
liest,

Happiest on earth, to heaven the
nighest.”

The children listened, while a solemn joy filled their hearts; then they stepped softly to the window to see who might be without.

In the east was a streak of rosy dawn, and in its light they saw a

CHRISTMAS TREE LEGEND

group of children standing before the house, clothed in silver garments, holding golden harps in their hands. Amazed at this sight, the children were still gazing out of the window, when a light tap caused them to turn around. There stood the stranger-child before them clad in a golden dress, with a gleaming radiance round his curling hair. "I am the little Christ-child," he said, "who wanders through the world bringing peace and happiness to good children. You took me in and cared for me when you thought me a poor child, and now you shall have my blessing for what you have done."

A fir tree grew near the house; and from this he broke a twig, which he planted in the ground, saying: "This twig shall become a tree, and shall bring forth fruit year by year for you."

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

No sooner had he done this than he vanished, and with him the little choir of angels. But the fir-branch grew and became a Christmas tree, and on its branches hung golden apples and silver nuts every Christmas-tide.

Such is the story told to German children concerning their beautiful Christmas trees, though we know that the real little Christ-child can never be wandering, cold and homeless, again in our world, inasmuch as he is safe in heaven by his Father's side; yet we may gather from this story the same truth which the Bible plainly tells us—that anyone who helps a Christian child in distress, it will be counted unto him as if he had indeed done it unto Christ himself. “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

The Christmas Goblins

By Charles Dickens

In an old abbey town, a long, long while ago there officiated as sexton and gravedigger in the churchyard one Gabriel Grubb. He was an ill conditioned, cross-grained, surly fellow, who consorted with nobody but himself and an old wicker-bottle which fitted into his large, deep waistcoat pocket.

A little before twilight one Christmas Eve, Gabriel shouldered his spade, lighted his lantern, and be-took himself toward the old church-yard, for he had a grave to finish by next morning, and feeling very low, he thought it might raise his spirits, perhaps, if he went on with his work at once.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

He strode along until he turned into the dark lane which led to the churchyard—a nice, gloomy, mournful place into which the towns-people did not care to go except in broad daylight; consequently he was not a little indignant to hear a Merry Christmas. Gabriel waited until the boy came up, then rapped him over the head with his lantern five or six times to teach him to modulate his voice. And as the boy hurried away, with his hand to his head, Gabriel Grubb chuckled to himself and entered the churchyard locking the gate behind him.

He took off his coat, put down his lantern, and getting into an unfinished grave, worked at it for an hour or so with right good will. But the earth was hardened with the frost, and it was no easy matter to break it up and shovel it out. At

THE CHRISTMAS GOBLINS

any other time this would have made Gabriel very miserable, but he was so pleased at having stopped the small boy's singing that he took little heed of the scanty progress he had made when he had finished work for the night, and looked down into the grave with grim satisfaction, murmuring as he gathered up his things:

“Brave lodgings for one, brave
lodgings for one,
A few feet of cold earth when
life is done.”

“Ho! ho!” he laughed, as he set himself down on a flat tombstone, which was a favorite resting-place of his, and drew forth his wicker-bottle. “A coffin at Christmas! A christmas box. Ho! ho! ho!”

“Ho! ho! ho!” repeated a voice close beside him.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

"It was the echoes," said he, raising the bottle to his lips again.

"It was not," said a deep voice.

Gabriel started up and rooted to the spot with terror, for his eyes rested on a form that made his blood run cold.

Seated on an upright tombstone close to him was a strange unearthly figure. He was sitting perfectly still, grinning at Gabriel Grubb with such a grin as only a goblin could call up.

"What do you here on Christmas Eve?" said the goblin, sternly.

"I came to dig a grave, sir," stammered Gabriel.

"What man wanders among graves on such a night as this?" cried the goblin.

"Gabriel Grubb! Gabriel Grubb!" screamed a wild chorus of voices that seemed to fill the churchyard.

THE CHRISTMAS GOBLINS

“What have you got in that bottle?” said the goblin.

“Hollands, sir,” replied the sexton, trembling more than ever, for he had bought it of the smugglers, and he thought his questioner might be in the excise department of the goblins.

“Who drinks Hollands alone, and in a churchyard on such a night as this?”

“Gabriel Grubb! Gabriel Grubb!” exclaimed the wild voices again.

“And who, then, is our lawful prize?” exclaimed the goblin, raising his voice.

The invisible chorus replied, “Gabriel Grubb! Gabriel Grubb!”

“Well, Gabriel, what do you say to this?” said the goblin, as he grinned a broader grin than before.

The sexton gasped for breath.

“What do you think of this, Gabriel?”

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"It's—it's very curious, sir, very curious, sir, and very pretty," replied the sexton, half-dead with fright. "But I think I'll go back and finish my work, sir, if you please."

"Work!" said the goblin, "what work?"

"The grave, sir."

"Oh! the grave, eh? Who makes graves at a time when other men are merry, and takes a pleasure in it?"

Again the voices replied, "Gabriel Grubb! Gabriel Grubb!"

"I'm afraid my friends want you, Gabriel," said the goblin.

"Under favor, sir," replied the horror-stricken sexton, "I don't think they can; they don't know me, sir; I don't think the gentlemen have ever seen me."

"Oh! yes, they have. We know the man who struck the boy in the

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envious malice of his heart because the boy could be merry and he could not."

Here the goblin gave a loud, shrill laugh which the echoes returned twenty-fold.

"I—I am afraid I must leave you, sir," said the sexton, making an effort to move.

"Leave us!" said the goblin; "ho! ho! ho!"

As the goblin laughed he suddenly darted toward Gabriel, laid his hand upon his collar, and sank with him through the earth. And when he had had time to fetch his breath he found himself in what appeared to be a large cavern, surrounded on all sides by goblins ugly and grim.

"And now," said the king of the goblins, seated in the center of the room on an elevated seat—his friend of the churchyard—"show the man

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of misery and gloom a few of the pictures from our great store-houses."

As the goblin said this a cloud rolled gradually away and disclosed a small and scantily furnished but neat apartment. Little children were gathered round a bright fire, clinging to their mother's gown, or gamboling round her chair. A frugal meal was spread upon the table, and an elbow-chair was placed near the fire. Soon the father entered and the children ran to meet him. As he sat down to his meal the mother sat by his side and all seemed happiness and comfort.

"What do you think of that?" said the goblin.

G a b r i e l murmured something about its being very pretty.

"Show him some more," said the goblin.

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Many a time the cloud went and came, and many a lesson it taught to Gabriel Grubb. He saw that men who worked hard and earned their scanty bread were cheerful and happy. And he came to the conclusion it was a very respectable sort of a world after all. No sooner had he formed it than the cloud closed over the last picture seemed to settle on his senses and lull him to repose. One by one the goblins faded from his sight, and as the last one disappeared he sank to sleep.

The day had broken when he awoke, and found himself on the flat gravestone, with the wicker-bottle empty by his side. He got on his feet as well as he could, and brushing the frost off his coat, turned his face toward the town.

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But he was an altered man, he had learned lessons of gentleness and good-nature by his strange adventures in the goblin's cavern.





The Christmas Princess

By Mrs. Molesworth

In the olden times there lived a king who was worthy of the name. He loved his people, and his people loved him in return. His kingdom must have been large; at least it appears to be beyond doubt that it extended a good way in different

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directions, for it was called the Kingdom of the Four Orts, which, of course, as everybody knows, means that he had possessions north, south, east, and west.

It was not so large, however, but that he was able to manage it well for himself — that is to say, with certain help which I will tell you of. A year never passed without his visiting every part of his dominions and inquiring for himself into the affairs of his subjects. Perhaps —who can say?—the world was not so big in those days; doubtless, however that may have been, there were not so many folk living on it.

Many things were different in those times: many things existed which nowadays would be thought strange and incredible. Human beings knew much more than they do now about the other dwellers on the

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earth. For instance, it was no uncommon case to find learned men who were able to converse with animals quite as well as with each other. Fairies, of course, were often visible to mortal eyes, and it was considered quite natural that they should interfere for good—sometimes, perhaps, for evil; as to that I cannot say—in human affairs. And good King Brave-Heart was especially favored in this way. For the help which, as I said, was his in governing his people was that of four very wise counselors indeed—the four fairies of the North and the South, the East and the West.

These sisters were very beautiful as well as very wise. Though older than the world itself, they always looked young. They were very much attached to each other, though they seldom met, and it must be con-

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and windows, and all the palace servants went hurrying and scurrying about to make great fires and hang up thick curtains and get everything in order for the cold season, which they had not expected so soon.

"It will not last," said the King, quietly. "In a few days there will be milder weather again." But, nevertheless, he still looked grave.

And early the next morning, as he was sitting with the Queen, who was beginning to feel a little frightened at the continuance of the storm, the double doors of her boudoir suddenly flew open, an icy blast filled the room, and a tall, white-shrouded figure stood before them.

"I have come to fetch you, Brave-Heart," she said abruptly. "You are wanted, sorely wanted, in my part of the world. The people are starving; the season has been a poor one,

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and there has been bad faith. Some few powerful men have bought up the grain, which was already scarce, and refuse to let the poor folk have it. Nothing will save their lives or prevent sad suffering but your own immediate presence. Are you ready? You must have seen I was coming."

She threw off her mantle as she spoke and sank on to a couch. Strong as she was, she seemed tired with the rate at which she had traveled, and the warm air of the room was oppressive to her. Her clear, beautiful features looked harassed; her gray eyes full of anxiety. For the moment she took no notice of the Queen.

"Are you ready!" she repeated.

"Yes, I am ready!" said Brave-Heart, as he rose to his feet.

But the Queen threw herself upon him, with bitter crying and re-

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proaches. Would he leave her, and at such a time, a prey to all kinds of terrible anxiety? Then she turned to the fairy and upbraided her in unmeasured language. But the spirit of the North glanced at her with calm pity.

“Poor child!” she said, “I had almost forgotten you. The sights I have seen of late have been so terrible that they absorb me. Take courage, Claribel! Show yourself a queen. Think of the suffering mothers and their little ones whom your husband hastens to aid. All will be well with you, believe me. But you, too, must be brave and unselfish.”

It was no use. All she said but made the Queen more indignant. She would scarcely bid her husband farewell; she turned her back to the fairy with undignified petulance.

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"Foolish child," said the Northern spirit. "She will learn better some day."

Then she gave all her attention to the matter she had come about, explaining to the King as they journeyed exactly the measures he must take and the difficulties to be overcome. But though the King had the greatest faith in her advice, and never doubted that it was his duty to obey, his heart was sore, as you can understand.

Things turned out as he had said. The severe weather disappeared again as if by magic, and some weeks of unusually mild days followed. And when the winter did set in for good at last, it was with no great rigor. From time to time news reached the palace of the King's welfare. The tidings were cheering. His presence was effecting all that the fairy had hoped.

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So Queen Claribel ought to have been happy. But she was determined not to be. She did nothing but cry and abuse the fairy, declaring that she would never see her dear Brave-Heart again, and that if ever her baby came she was sure it would not live, or that there would be something dreadful the matter with it.

"It is not fair," she kept saying, "it is a shame that I should suffer so."

And even when on Christmas Eve a beautiful little girl was born, as pretty and lively and healthy as could be wished, and even though the next day brought the announcement of the King's immediate return, Claribel still nursed her resentment, though in the end it came to be directed entirely against the fairy. For when she saw Brave-Heart again his tender affection and

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his delight in his little daughter made it impossible for her not to "forgive him," as she expressed it, though she could not take any interest in his accounts of his visit to the north and all he had been able to do there.

A great feast was arranged in honor of the christening of the little Princess. All the grand people of the neighborhood were bidden to it, nor, you may be sure, did the good King forget the poorer folk. The four fairies were invited, for it was a matter of course that they should be the baby's godmothers. And though the Queen would gladly have excluded the Northern fairy, she dared not even hint at such a thing.

But she resolved in her own mind to do all in her power to show that she was not the welcome fairy.

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On such occasions, when human beings were honored by the presence of fairy visitors, these distinguished guests were naturally given precedence of all others, otherwise very certainly they would never have come again. Even among fairies themselves there are ranks and formalities, and the Queen well knew that the first place was due to the Northern spirit. But she gave instructions that this rule should be departed from, and the Snow fairy, as she was sometimes called, found herself placed at the King's left hand, separated from him by her sister of the West, instead of next to him on the right, which seat, on the contrary, was occupied by the fairy of the South. She glanced around her calmly, but took no notice; and the King, imagining that by her own choice perhaps, she had chosen the unusual position, made no remark.

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And the feast progressed with the accustomed splendor and rejoicing.

But at the end, when the moment arrived at which the four godmothers were expected to state their gifts to the baby, the Queen's spite could be no longer concealed.

"I request," she exclaimed, "that for reasons well known to herself, to the King, and to myself, the Northern fairy's gift may be the last in order instead of the first."

The King started and grew pale. The beautiful soft-voiced fairy of the South, in her glowing golden draperies, would fain have held back, for her affection for her sterner sister was largely mingled with awe. But the Snow fairy signed to her imperiously to speak.

"I bestow upon the Princess Sweet-Heart," she said, half tremblingly, "the gift of great beauty."

"And I," said the spirit of the

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East, who came next, her red robe falling majestically around her, her dark hair lying smoothly in its thick masses on her broad, low forehead "I give her great powers of intellect and intelligence."

"And I, said the Western fairy with a bright, breezy flutter of her sea-green garments, "health — perfect health and strength of body, as my gift to the pretty child."

"And you," said the Queen bitterly, "you, cold-hearted fairy, who have done your best to kill me with misery, who came between my husband and me, making him neglect me as he never would have done, but for your influence—what will you give my child? Will you do something to make amends for the suffering you caused? I would rather my pretty baby were dead

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than that she lived to endure what I have of late endured."

"Life and death are not mine to bestow or to withhold," said the Northern spirit calmly, as she drew her white garments more closely around her with a majestic air. "So your rash words, foolish woman, fortunately for you all, cannot touch the child. But something—much—I can do, and I will. She shall not know the suffering you dread for her with so cowardly a fear. She shall be what you choose to fancy I am. And instead of the name you have given her, she shall be known for what she is—Princess Ice-Heart."

She turned to go, but the King on one hand, her three sisters on the other, started forward to detain her.

"Have pity!" exclaimed the former.

"Sister, bethink you," said the

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latter; the Western fairy adding beseechingly, the tears springing in her blue eyes, which so quickly changed from bright to sad, "Say something to soften this hard fate. Undo it you cannot, I know. Or, at least, allow me to mitigate it if I can."

The Snow fairy stopped; in truth, she was far from hard-hearted or remorseless, and already she was beginning to feel half sorry for what she had done.

"What would you propose?" she said coldly.

The fairy of the West threw back her auburn hair with a gesture of impatience.

"I would I knew!" she said. "'Tis a hard knot you have tied, my sister. For that which would mend the evil wrought seems to me impossible while the evil exists—the cure and

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the cessation of the disease are one. How could the heart of ice be melted till tender feelings warm it, and how can tender feelings find entrance into a feelingless heart? Alas! Alas! I can but predict what sounds like a mockery of your trouble," she went on, turning to the King, though indeed by this time she might have included the Queen in her sympathy, for Claribel stood, horrified at the result of her mad resentment, as pale as Brave-Heart himself. "Hearken!" and her expressive face, over which sunshine and showers were wont to chase each other as on an April day—for such, as all know, is the nature of the changeful, lovable spirit of the West—for once grew still and statue-like, while her blue eyes pierced far into the distance. "The day on which the Princess of the Icy Heart shall shed

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a tear, that heart shall melt—but then only."

The Northern fairy murmured something under her breath, but what the words were no one heard, for it was not many that dared stand near to her, so terribly cold was her presence. The graceful spirit of the South fluttered her golden locks, and with a little sigh drew her radiant mantle round her, and kissed her hand in farewell, while the thoughtful-eyed, mysterious Eastern fairy linked her arm in that of her Western sister, and whispered that the solution of the problem should have her most earnest study. And the green-robed spirit tried to smile through her tears in farewell as she suffered herself to be led away.

So the four strange guests departed; but their absence was not followed by the usual outburst of

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unconstrained festivity. On the contrary, a sense of sorrow and dread hung over all who remained, and before long everyone not immediately connected with the palace respectfully but silently withdrew, leaving the King and Queen to their mysterious sorrow.

Claribel flew to the baby's cradle. The little Princess was sleeping soundly; she looked rosy and content—a picture of health. Her mother called eagerly to the King.

"She seems just as usual," she exclaimed. "Perhaps—oh! perhaps after all I have done no harm."

For, strange to say, her resentment against the Northern fairy had died away. She now felt nothing but shame and regret for her own wild temper. "Perhaps," she went on, "it was but to try me, to teach me a lesson, that the Snow fairy uttered those terrible words."

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Brave-Heart pitied his wife deeply, but he shook his head.

"I dare not comfort you with any such hopes," he said, "my poor Claribel. The fairy is true—true as steel—if you could but have trusted her! Had you seen her, as I have done—full of tenderest pity for suffering—you could never have so maligned her."

Claribel did not answer, but her tears dropped on the baby's face. The little Princess seemed annoyed by them. She put up her tiny hand and, with a fretful expression, brushed them off.

And that very evening the certainty came.

The head nurse sent for the Queen while she was undressing the child, and the mother hastened to the nursery. The attendants were standing

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round in the greatest anxiety, for, though the baby looked quite well otherwise, there was the strangest coldness over her left side, in the region of the heart. The skin looked perfectly colorless, and the soft cambric and still softer flannel of the finest which had covered the spot were stiff, as if they had been exposed to a winter night's frost.

"Alas!" exclaimed Claribel, but that was all. It was no use sending for doctors—no use doing anything. Her own delicate hand when she laid it on the baby's heart was, as it were, blistered with cold. The next morning she found it covered with chilblains.

But the baby did not mind. She flourished amazingly, heart or no heart. She was perfectly healthy, ate well, slept well, and soon gave signs of unusual intelligence. She

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was seldom put out, but when angry she expressed her feelings by loud roars and screams, though with never a tear! At first this did not seem strange, as no infant sheds tears during the earliest weeks of its life. But when she grew to six months old, then to a year, then to two and three, and was near her fourth birthday without ever crying, it became plain that the prediction was indeed to be fulfilled.

And the name "Ice-Heart" clung to her. In spite of all her royal parents' commands to the contrary, "Princess Ice-Heart" she was called far and near. It seemed as if people could not help it. "Sweet-Heart we cannot name her, for sweet she is not," was murmured by all who came in contact with her.

And it was true. Sweet she certainly was not. She was beautiful

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and healthy and intelligent, but she had no feeling. In some ways she gave little trouble. Her temper, though occasionally violent, was, as a rule, placid; she seemed contented in almost all circumstances. When her good old nurse died, she remarked coolly that she hoped her new attendant would dress her hair more becomingly; when King Brave-Heart started on some of his distant journeys she bade him good-bye with a smile, observing that if he never came home again it would be rather amusing, as she would then reign instead of him, and when she saw her mother break into sobs at her unnatural speech she stared at her in blank astonishment.

And so things went on until Ice-Heart reached her seventeenth year. By this time she was, as regarded her outward appearance, as beauti-

ful as the fondest of parents could desire; she was also exceedingly strong and healthy, and the powers of her mind were unusual. Her education had been carefully directed, and she had learnt with ease and interest.

She could speak in several languages; her paintings were worthy of admiration, as they were skillful and well executed; she could play with brilliancy on various instruments. She had also been taught to sing, but her voice was metallic and unpleasing. But she could discuss scientific and philosophical subjects with the sages of her father's kingdom like one of themselves.

And besides all this care bestowed upon her training, no stone had been left unturned in hopes of awakening in the unfortunate girl some affection or emotion. Every day the

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most soul-stirring poetry was read aloud to her by the greatest elocutionists, the most exciting and moving dramas were enacted before her; she was taken to visit the poor of the city in their pitiable homes; she was encouraged to see sad sights from which most soft-hearted maidens would instinctively flee. But all was in vain. She would express interest and ask intelligent questions with calm, unmoved features and dry eyes. Even music, from which much had been hoped, was powerless to move her to aught but admiration of the performers' skill or curiosity as to the construction of their instruments. There was but one peculiarity about her, which sometimes, though they could not have explained why, seemed to Ice-Heart's unhappy parents to hint at some shadowy hope. The sight of tears

was evidently disagreeable to her. More certainly than anything else did the signs of weeping arouse one of her rare fits of anger—so much so that now and then, for days together, the poor Queen dared not come near her child, and tears were to her a frequent relief from her lifelong regrets.

So beautiful and wealthy and accomplished a maiden was naturally not without suitors; and from this direction, too, at first, Queen Claribel trusted fondly that cure might come.

“If she could but fall in love,” she said, the first time the idea struck her.

“My poor dear!” replied the King, “to see, you must have eyes; to love, you must have a heart.”

“But a heart she has,” persisted the mother. “It is only, as it were asleep—frozen, like the winter steam

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which bursts forth again into ever fresh life and movement with the awaking spring."

So lovers were invited, and lovers came and were made welcome by the dozen. Lovers of every description—rich and poor, old and young, handsome and ugly—so long as they were of passable birth and fair character, King Brave-Heart was not too particular—in the forlorn hope that among them one fortunate wight might rouse some sentiment in the lovely statue he desired to win. But all in vain. Each prince, or duke, or simple knight, duly instructed in the sad case, did his best; one would try poetry, another his lute, a third sighs and appeals, a fourth, imagining he had made some way, would attempt the bold stroke of telling Ice-Heart that unless she could respond to his adoration he would drown himself.

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She only smiled, and begged him to allow her to witness the performance —she had never seen anyone drown. So, one by one, the troupe of aspirants—some in disgust, some in strange fear, some in annoyance—took their departure, preferring a more ordinary spouse than the bewitched though beautiful Princess.

And she saw them go with calmness, though, in one or two cases she had replied to her parents that she had no objection to marrying Prince So-and-so, or Count Such-another, if they desired it—it would be rather agreeable to have a husband if he gave her plenty of presents and did all she asked. “Though a sighing and moaning lover, or a man who is always twiddling a fiddle or making verses I could not stand,” she would add contemptuously.

So King Brave-Heart thought it

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best to try no such experiment. And in the future no gentleman was allowed to present himself except with the understanding that he alone who should succeed in making Princess Ice-Heart shed a tear would be accepted as her betrothed.

This proclamation diminished at once the number of suitors. Indeed, after one or two candidates had failed, no more appeared—so well did it come to be known that the attempt was hopeless.

And for more than a year Princess Ice-Heart was left to herself—very much, apparently, to her satisfaction.

But all this time the mystic sisters were not idle or forgetful. Several of the aspirants to Ice-Heart's hand had been chosen by them and conveyed to the neighborhood of the palace by their intermediacy from

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remote lands. And among these, one of the few who had found some slight favor in the maiden's eyes was a special protege of the Western fairy—the young and spirited Prince Francolin.

He was not one of the sighing or sentimental order of swains; he was full of life and adventure and brightness, and his heart was warm and generous. He admired the beautiful girl, but he pitied her still more, and this pity was the real motive which made him yield to the fairy's proposal that he should try again.

"What do you propose?" said Francolin, gravely, for he could be serious enough when seriousness was called for. "She did not actually dislike me, but that is the most that can be said; and however I may feel for her, however I may admire her beauty and intelligence, nothing would induce

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me to wed a bride who could not return my affection. Indeed, I could scarcely feel any for such a one."

"Ah no! I agree with you entirely," said the fairy. "But listen—my power is great in some ways. I am well versed in ordinary enchantment and am most willing to employ my utmost skill for my unfortunate god-daughter."

She then unfolded to him her scheme, and obtained his consent to it.

"Now is your time," she said in conclusion. "I hear on the best authority that Ice-Heart is feeling rather dull and bored at present. It is some time since she has had the variety of a new suitor, and she will welcome any distraction."

And she proceeded to arrange all the details of her plan.

So it came to pass that very shortly

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after the conversation I have related there was great excitement in the capital city of the Kingdom of the Four Orts. After an interval of more than a year a new suitor had at length presented himself for the hand of the Princess Ice-Heart. Only the King and Queen received the news with melancholy indifference.

“He may try as the others have done,” said Brave-Heart to the messenger announcing the arrival of the stranger at the gates, accompanied by a magnificent retinue; “but it is useless.” For the poor king was fast losing all hope of his daughter’s case; he was growing aged and care-worn before his time.

“Does he know the terms attached to his acceptance?” inquired the Queen.

Yes, the messenger from the unknown candidate for the hand of the

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beautiful Ice-Heart had been expressly charged to say that the Prince Jocko—such was the newcomer's name—was fully informed as to all particulars, and prepared to comply with the conditions.

The Princess' parents smiled somewhat bitterly. They had no hope, but still they could not forbid the attempt.

"Prince Jocko?" said the King, "not a very prince-like name. However, it matters little."

A few hours later the royal pair and their daughter, with all their attendants, in great state and ceremony, were awaiting their guest. And soon a blast of trumpets announced his approach. His retinue was indeed magnificent; horsemen in splendid uniforms, followed by a troop of white mules with negro riders in gorgeous attire, then musi-

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cians, succeeded by the Prince's immediate attendants, defiled before great marble steps in front of the palace, at the summit of which the King, and the Queen and Princess, were seated in state.

Ice-Heart clapped her hands.

" 'Tis as good as a show," she said, "but where is the Prince?"

As she said the word the cortege halted. A litter, with closely drawn curtains, drew up at the foot of the steps.

"Gracious!" exclaimed the Princess. "I hope he is not a molly-coddle;" but before there was time to say more the curtains of the litter were drawn aside, and in another moment an attendant had lifted out its occupant, who forthwith proceeded to ascend the steps.

The parents and their daughter stared at each other and gasped.

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Prince Jocko was neither more nor less than a monkey!

But such a monkey as never before had been seen. He was more comical than words can express, and when at last he stood before them, and bowed to the ground, a three-cornered hat in his hand, his sword sticking straight out behind, his tail sweeping the ground, the effect was irresistible. King Brave-Heart turned his head aside, Queen Claribel smothered her face in her handkerchief, Princess Ice-Heart opened her pretty mouth wide and forgot to close it again, while a curious expression stole into her beautiful eyes.

Was it a trick?

No; Prince Jocko proceeded to speak.

He laid his little brown paw on his heart, bowed again, coughed, sneezed, and finally began an oration. If his

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appearance was too funny, his words and gestures were a hundred times more so. He rolled his eyes, he declaimed, he posed and pirouetted like a miniature dancing-master, and his little cracked voice rose higher and higher as his own fine words and expressions increased in eloquence.

And at last a sound—which never before had been heard, save faintly—made everyone start. The Princess was laughing as if she could no longer contain herself. Clear, ringing, merry laughter, which it did one's heart good to hear. And on she went, laughing ever, till—she flung herself at her mother's feet, the tears rolling down her cheeks.

“Oh, mamma!” she exclaimed, “I never—” and then she went off again.

But Prince Jocko suddenly grew silent. He stepped up to Ice-Heart and, respectfully raising her hand to

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his lips, gazing earnestly, beseechingly into her face, his own keen sharp eyes gradually growing larger and deeper in expression, till they assumed the pathetic, wistful look of appeal one often sees in those of a noble dog.

“Ah, Princess!” he murmured.

And Ice-Heart stopped laughing. She pressed her hand to her side.

“Father! mother!” she cried, “help me! help me! Am I dying? What has happened to me?” And, with a strange, long-drawn sigh she sank fainting to the ground.

There was great excitement in the palace, hurrying to and fro, fetching of doctors, and much alarm. But when the Princess had been carried indoors and laid on a couch, she soon revived. And who can describe the feelings of the King and Queen when she turned to them with a smile such

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as they had never seen on her face before.

“Dearest father, dearest mother,” she said, “how I love you! Those strange warm drops that filled my eyes seem to have brought new life to me,” and as the Queen passed her arm round the maiden she felt no chill of cold such as used to thrill her with misery every time she embraced her child.

“Sweet-Heart! my own Sweet-Heart!” she whispered.

And the Princess whispered back, “Yes, call me by that name always.”

All was rejoicing when the wonderful news of the miraculous cure spread through the palace and the city. But still the parents’ hearts were sore, for was not the King’s word pledged that his daughter should marry him who had effected

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this happy change? And this was no other than Jocko, the monkey!

The Prince had disappeared at the moment that Ice-Heart fainted, and now with his retinue he was encamped outside the walls. All sorts of ideas occurred to the King.

"I cannot break my word," he said, "but we might try to persuade the little monster to release me from it."

But the Princess would not hear of this.

"No," she said, "I owe him too deep a debt of gratitude to think of such a thing. And in his eyes I read more than I can put in words. No, dear father! you must summon him at once to be presented to our people as my affianced husband."

So again the cortege of Prince Jocko made its way to the palace and again the litter, with its closely drawn curtains, drew up at the mar-

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ble steps. And Sweet-Heart stood, pale, but calm and smiling, to welcome her ridiculous betrothed.

But who is this that quickly mounts the stairs with firm and manly tread? Sweet-Heart nearly swooned again.

“Jocko?” she murmured. “Where is Jocko? Why this is Prince Fran-colin!”

“Yes, dear child,” said a bright voice beside her; and, turning round, Sweet-Heart beheld the Western fairy, who, with her sisters, had suddenly arrived. “Yes, indeed! Fran-colin, and no other!”

The universal joy may be imagined. Even the grave fairy of the North smiled with pleasure and delight, and, as she kissed her pretty god-daughter, she took the girl’s hand and pressed it against her own heart.

“Never misjudge me, Sweet-

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Heart," she whispered. "Cold as I seem to those who have not courage to approach me closely, my heart, under my icy mantle, is as warm as is now your own."

And so it was.

Where can we get a better ending than the time-honored one? Fran-colin and Sweet-Heart were married, and lived happy ever after, and who knows but what in the Kingdom of the Four Orts, they are living happily still?

If only we knew the way thither, we might see for ourselves if it is so.

The Wooden Shoe

LONG, long ago, in a quaint old city in northern France, there lived a poor and unhappy little boy named Wolff. He was only seven years old, yet he could dimly remember a time when he had been very happy indeed. It was when his dear father and mother were alive; but now he was an orphan, and lived with an old aunt, who was very hard and greedy. She never kissed the lonely little boy, or showed him any sign of affection. Indeed, she seemed to grudge him the very food he ate. But the child was so alone in the world, and his little heart was so full of love that he was fond of his aunt in spite of all. He would have liked

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to tell her so, but dared not, for fear she would whip him.

Had it not been that all the villagers knew the aunt to be a house-owner, and the possessor of a bag of gold, she would have sent Wolff to the free school for the poor of the parish. As it was, she obtained a reduction in price from the teacher, and sent the child to school dressed in shabby, ragged old clothes. The better clad children, his classmates, were unkind to the little lad, perhaps without realizing their cruelty, and the teacher made no effort whatever to check the fun at Wolff's expense, so that he was wretchedly unhappy most of the time.

Never did his life seem quite so hard, however, as at Christmas time, when all the other children were talking gayly of the gifts they were to receive. On Christmas eve it was

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the custom for the schoolmaster to take all the scholars to church. They met at the teacher's house, and on this particular Christmas eve, as the weather was very severe, and the snow lay thick on the ground, they all came bundled up in their warmest clothing, with soft fur caps to protect their ears, snug mittens on their hands, and thick-soled shoes on their feet.

All but poor little Wolff. He wore the same thin, shabby clothes that served him for week-days and Sundays alike. His bare hands, rough and red with the cold, were thrust deep into his pockets to keep them warm, and his feet were protected only by coarse socks and wooden shoes, or sabots. Of course, the others made fun of him as usual, but Wolff was much too cold and miser-

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able to pay any attention to what they said about him.

But as they walked along, two by two, with the teacher in the lead, he could not help but hear the stories they told of the good suppers they would have when they reached home. All manner of goodies they described, from roast goose stuffed with truffles down to candies and nuts. It was hard for Wolff to be obliged to listen to these remarks, for he knew very well, from past experiences, that he would be sent to bed supperless.

Finally, when it seemed as if he could bear it no longer, the talk turned from the good things to eat to the presents the Christ-child would bring them, for every boy and girl there meant to place his shoes in the chimney corner the last thing before going to bed. Then, if they had

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been tolerably good all the year, in the morning they would find the shoes full of all sorts of pretty things, toys of every sort, bright, new clothing, cakes and candies.

Now, Wolff, too, looked forward to putting his wooden shoes before the fire that night, though, to be sure, he had never found much in them on a Christmas morning, at least not of late years, but he knew that he had been good all through the year, and during the services he kept thinking that perhaps THIS year would bring him something fine.

After church the children started home again, two by two as before, the teacher, and little Wolff in his shabby suit, bringing up the rear alone. As they passed the threshold all noticed someone who had not been there when they entered, a child, a stranger to them all, who sat

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sleeping on the stone bench by the church door. He wore only a thin linen robe, despite the biting air, and his bare feet were blue with the cold. Yet he was not a beggar child, for his clothes were new and clean, and besides him on the porch lay the tools of a carpenter's apprentice—the saw, the square, the hammer and pair of compasses. Soft, golden hair fell in loose curls about a face of singular sweetness, and gentleness.

The well-dressed, warmly shoed children of the town hurried by the sleeping stranger with scarcely a careless glance, so eager were they, perhaps, to get home to their good suppers and their cosy beds. One only paused a moment, but it was to give a sneering look of scorn. But little Wolff, the last one of the line, stopped with a cry of dismay and

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pity. His own wretched discomfort made him realize how hard it was to go shoeless on such a night, and he felt a sense of deeper grief because the little unknown had no shoes, not even a wooden sabot, to place by the fireside for the Christ-child to fill. That was too cruel. With a sudden impulse Wolff drew off his right shoe, and laid it beside the sleeping boy. Then, limping along through the snow, he made his way home.

There a worse thing than a foot chilled and half frozen awaited him, for his aunt was in a fury at his loss of a shoe, and demanded to know what he had done with it. Shaking with cold and terror the little boy tried to tell her what he had done and why. She burst into a peal of angry laughter at his words.

“And so the little Milord Wolff gave his shoe to a beggar?” she

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sneered. "The shoe that is left goes here in the fireplace, and you may be quite sure it will be filled tomorrow—with a whip. Then you shall feast on bread and water—and the whip again. Perhaps then you will learn not to give your clothing away to idle vagabonds who are found sleeping around the streets."

She emphasized her remarks with a vigorous slap, and Wolff crept up the stairs to his cold attic room, there to cry himself to sleep. He was aroused in the morning by a startled cry from his aunt, and so strange did her usually harsh voice seem, that the child thought she must be ill, or have hurt herself in some way, and leaping from his bed, where he had thrown himself fully dressed the night before, he went rushing down stairs.

She was standing by the fireplace,

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staring at something there, and as Wolff followed her gaze, he too stared and rubbed his eyes, for the whole chimney corner was full of beautiful toys and candies and warm clothing, and strangest of all, the right shoe, the very one he had given away—for there was the same rude cut in the wood near the toe—lay on the hearth beside its mate.

As Wolff stood there, the aunt's hard face began to soften, tears streamed down her cheeks, and slowly she dropped on her knees beside the little shoes. Impulsively Wolff ran to her side, and threw his arms around her, and they were still clasped in each other's arms when, some moments later, a sound of loud laughter and many voices just outside drew them to the door.

It was the neighbors, gathered about the village fountain, telling of a

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very extraordinary and amusing thing that had happened. All the rich children of the town, it seemed, had found nothing but whips in their shoes, and not a sign of the beautiful gifts of which they had been so sure. Everyone was pleased at this turn of affairs, but Wolff and his aunt, remembering the rich treasures in their own chimney corner, marveled greatly, and felt some doubt as to the rightful ownership of the presents.

But when they had gone together to the old village priest, and Wolff had told him the story from beginning to end, the old man, his face radiant, led them out onto the church porch.

“Look!” he said, and pointed to the stone wall.

And there on the very spot where, the night before, the sleeping child

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had rested his head, was now a circle of bright gold, inlaid with all manner of precious stones.

"It was the Christ-child himself," said the old man to the wondering boy, and the woman whose heart had been strangely softened. "For an hour, perhaps, he was here in the village, dressed as he used to be in his own home, and as he worked in the carpenter shop of his father, Joseph. And you, little Wolff, whom we all know to be a good lad, though in appearance the poorest and lowliest of the village, you were the only one to do him a kindness, or even give him a thought. The others thought only of receiving, but you thought of giving. The gifts are yours, Wolff. The Christ-child brought them to you.

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And that was the beginning of brighter and better days for Wolff and his aunt.

Mother Hubbard's House Party

MOTHER HUBBARD paused in front of the great long looking-glass in the hall and gave a last pat to the soft curls that framed her kindly old face. Then she straightened her crisp white apron, and, taking a plaid shawl from a hook on the wall, wrapped it carefully around her. Going to the door, she looked up and down the road for the village stage coach which would bring the little guests for the Christmas party.

Soon she was rewarded, for around the bend in the road dashed the stage coach at full speed. Shouts of merry laughter seemed to burst from the old carry-all and every window framed the happy, rosy faces of the little boys and girls inside. High up beside Jerry, the driver, were perched Geor-

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gie Porgie, of pudding and pie fame, and his little friend, Boy Blue.

Mother Hubbard hurried down the walk and reached the gate just as the stage, with a bang and a clatter, came to a stop.

"Toot-toot-toot!" blew little Boy Blue on his pretty tin horn. "Hello! Mother Hubbard," he called, as he began to climb down from his seat of honor.

"Oh, Mother Hubbard, just watch me crack Jerry's whip!" shouted Georgie Porgie, giving it another snap in the air before returning it to Jerry.

"Hello! Mother Hubbard!"

"Hello!"

Every one called at once, as they hurried out the door at the back of the stage and ran to Mother Hubbard, where she stood in the gateway.

"Welcome, dear children," she said, trying to make her arms reach around all of them at once. "Welcome to my home."

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The shouts of laughter and sounds of happy greetings had reached old Pom's ears as he was returning from a run across the snow-covered countryside. Now he raced around the house to add his welcome to that of Mother Hubbard's.

"Bow-wow-wow!" he barked joyously, as he shook hands with all of them. "Bow-wow!" and he turned a somersault, right there in front of the company, he was so happy.

"Oh, oh, oh," cried little Miss Muffet, in a scared tone of voice. "Oh, how he frightened me!" and she ran to Mother Hubbard's side.

"You know, ever since my terrible experience with that dreadful spider, I—I—oh, most anything is apt to frighten me."

And the Ten O'Clock Scholar, yawning and rubbing his eyes, blinked sleepily at the timid little maiden.

"Oh, ah, yum!" he yawned again, most impolitely, without saying "Ex-

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cuse me," and continued: "When I am about to be frightened, I just say to myself, 'It is only a bad dream, a very bad dream.' "

By this time all had entered the house and some were warming their tingling fingers before the blazing logs in the great fireplace, for it was very cold and Jack Frost had been about early that day. Others were unbuttoning their jackets and getting out of their overshoes.

"Now all of you bring your wraps and bags and come with me. I'll show you your rooms," said Mother Hubbard, starting for the stairs. There was a general scramble among all the children for their hats and coats and traveling bags, and when all had found their own, they followed Mother Hubbard to the floor above.

"Here," said Mother Hubbard, opening a door on one side of the wide upstairs hall, "is the room for the boys, and this," opening door across the hall, "is the room for the girls."

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The children crowding round Mother Hubbard saw that both rooms were exactly alike, for in each one there were five little snow-white beds in a row along one side of the room.

"Oh, how sweet!" said little Bo-Peep, going right into the girls' room and putting her jacket down on the bed nearest the window. "I choose this little bed here by the window, for then I may hear my dear little sheep should they call me loudly enough. My pretty little sheepies," she added, a bit sadly, "are you missing me, dears?"

"I will take this bed in the middle of the room for mine, for then I shall not be afraid with some one asleep on each side of me," spoke little Miss Muffet, placing her bag beside the bed of her choice.

"Oh, girls, aren't we going to have the best time here with Mother Hubbard!" exclaimed Jill, sliding her sled under her bed.

Little Jumping Joan fairly hopped

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up and down and all around in her excitement at really being at Mother Hubbard's house party. She ran from one little girl to another and put her arms about each of them in turn.

Then a lively sound came from the boys' room across the hall.

Georgie Porgie and Little Boy Blue were having a race. They were trying to see which one could get his grip-sack unpacked and all his clean little underclothes and blouses put in their proper places in the chest of drawers, first.

It was a close race. But Boy Blue had snapped his grip-sack shut and was pushing it far back under his bed before Georgie Porgie had even hung his tooth-brush in place over the wash-stand. And Boy Blue was not out of breath, either, though Georgie Porgie was panting and puffing at a great rate. Puddings and pies and all sweet things do make children pant and puff, you know.

Next Jack, Jill's twin brother, dared

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any boy in the room to stand on his head longer than he could.

Georgie Porgie was too out of breath, but Boy Blue was right at it. So was Jack Horner, and when Mother Hubbard and the girls looked in at the open door, there in a row stood the three boys on their heads.

Jack Horner cracked his heels together smartly when he saw that they were being watched, and he and Boy Blue and Jack got on their feet at once. Georgie Porgie danced over to Mother Hubbard and, putting his arms around her ample waist, danced her around with him in a circle until the merry old lady fairly gasped for breath.

"Oh, you dear, dear, funny children," she said.

She was still breathing very hard when Jack Horner, who always thought of nice things to do before any one else, said, "Let us help Mother Hubbard get supper."

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"Yes, yes," answered all the boys and girls quickly.

"We will bring some wood from the shed," said Georgie Porgie and Boy Blue, hurrying away.

"I'll fetch some water from the well," said Jill's brother, Jack.

"And I will skim the milk and cut the bread, so that I may stay close to you, dear Mother Hubbard," said Miss Muffet.

"Shall we set the table, Mother Hubbard?" asked Jumping Joan and Jill, rushing back from their room and trying very hard to button their work aprons without any one's help.

"Listen," said Mother Hubbard.

"Bow-wow-wow!" barked Pom.

"What can Pom want?" spoke Mother Hubbard again, starting briskly toward the stairway. She knew that her pet would never call so sharply unless he wanted her badly.

All the children followed her down the stairs and when they reached the

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door of the living-room, what do you think they saw?

There, on one side of the fireplace, in Mother Hubbard's big high-back rocking-chair, sat the fat little Ten O'Clock Scholar fast asleep. His grip-sack was lying on the floor, just as it had fallen from his hand. And at his feet, all curled up on Mother Hubbard's bright red hassock, was Mary's little lamb, fast asleep, too.

At this sight, the children broke into roars of laughter.

"Oh, ah, yum," yawned the Ten O'Clock Scholar, waking up, "I was dreaming. I thought I was at Mother Hubbard's Christmas party."

"You are, you are," the children shouted and laughed harder than ever, "and you had better hurry up if you want to help get the supper," they called as they hurried out to the big warm kitchen.

Mother Hubbard and her little friends, as you may well imagine, had a wonderful Christmas party.



Now breaks the latest Christmas Morn!
Again the angels sing,
And far and near the children throng
Their happy hymns to bring.



The jolly days of Christmastime,
The wonder days of all the year,
When holy bells their message chime
“Good will to ye, good cheer.”

